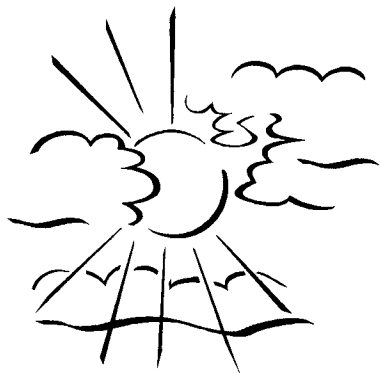


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Articles in Today's Clips

Tuesday, July 5, 2005

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Letters to the Editor

Detroit Free Press

July 3, 2005

Break the cycle of child abuse

July 3, 2005

As a society, we keep talking about child abuse but doing very little to prevent it. Two stories in the June 27 Free Press provided proof.

In the front-page article, "A cycle of despair," you noted that parents accused of abuse themselves fit a profile of abuse. You explained that women who abuse children are often "young, uneducated, poor, unmarried, and involved with an abusive man." In the second article, "Detroit preschool spaces to be cut," you explain that budget cuts will reduce nearly 1,300 spaces in the Detroit Public Schools' Headstart and Michigan School Readiness programs.

True, research indicates that uneducated moms -- and dads -- are more likely to abuse their children. Yet we close our eyes in sadness at the thought of a woman standing accused of killing a toddler, but we read with just casual interest that nearly 1,300 children in Detroit will not receive the opportunity to get the preschool social and preliteracy skills they need to succeed when they enter kindergarten.

There is an important connection between the two articles. At Child's Hope, we provide the Jumpstart Program, a system of mentors for preschool children at risk. We put our emphasis on the belief that the cycle of abuse stops only when children are given the opportunity to receive an education and succeed.

To break the cycle of abuse, we need more early education programs. Sure, it's great to offer parenting classes to abusive parents, but wouldn't it make more sense to start at the beginning, to help children themselves break the cycle of abuse by gaining the self-respect and education they need to lead a healthy life?

Judith S. Hoeffler, Ph.D.

Executive Director, Child's Hope

Dearborn

Lives and funds

The deaths of the infants and young children profiled raise more than the tears in my eyes. They signal just how tough these times are for infants and young children in vulnerable families. As our lawmakers in Lansing wrestle to balance the budget, we must not allow them to determine the "price" of the lives of Michigan's youngest citizens by slashing or eliminating funds that build strong families -- all in order to save a dime. Save lives instead.

Melissa Freel

Troy

Misplaced blame

I was disgusted by the article "Cycle of despair." I expected to read about the poor babies who were needlessly killed, but instead I was bombarded with excuses for the abusers.

There are many overwhelmed, tired, poor, uneducated mothers who do not kill their children or stepchildren. Write about them. God help our society if lawyers of the accused are going to place blame anywhere else but solely on their client.

Jennifer L. Dorsch

Bloomfield Hills

No understanding

The overall tone of your article was to make readers "understand" why these mothers would commit such awful acts. I will never understand such actions, and I feel no pity for these women.

Most offensive was the quote by Professor Michelle Oberman, who stated, "This is a reflection of who we are as a society," and "there is blood on more than one set of hands." What an offense to those of us who love and cherish our children.

David A. Baird

Novi

Woman convicted of killing girl

She'll get a life term for scalding toddler

July 2, 2005

BY L.L. BRASIER

FREE PRESS STAFF WRITER

A somber Oakland County jury deliberated for two hours before convicting an Orion Township woman of first-degree murder Friday for placing her boyfriend's toddler in a bathtub of scalding water, then letting the child die of the injuries without getting help.

Letitia Johnson, 28, rocked slightly as the verdict was read, but otherwise showed no emotion.

She will be sentenced to life in prison July 22.

The dead child's mother, Jamila Lawrence, surrounded by family, smiled through her tears at the verdict. And as the jurors -- five women and seven men -- left the courtroom, she silently mouthed the words "thank you" to each of them.

Lawrence's father, Titus Lawrence, who sat with her throughout the trial said, "It doesn't bring closure, but it's a start."

Jamila Lawrence said she and her family were going to Jasmine Phillips' tiny grave after leaving the courthouse. Johnson, a mother of seven, took Jasmine, 21 months old, on the night of Dec. 18 and placed her in a tub of steaming water and held her there as Jasmine screamed, according to the evidence in the three-day trial.

Johnson then slathered petroleum jelly on the child and placed her on a mattress. Jasmine died within hours of dehydration caused by the massive third-degree burns that covered her body from the waist down.

The child's father, Louie Phillips, Johnson's on-again, off-again boyfriend, was at work at the time.

Johnson told different stories to police -- that the burns were caused by cleaning chemicals she'd used in the tub prior to the bath, and that one of the other children had run the hot tub and placed Jasmine in it. But soon Johnson's stories began to unravel.

While in jail, charged with second-degree murder, she described to a fellow inmate how she hated the toddler, and was resentful that Louie Phillips wanted her to take care of the child.

Johnson gave the fellow inmate intimate details of the murder -- how Jasmine was screaming and clutching at her, trying to escape the scalding water. Police learned of the confession and Johnson was charged with the more serious crime of first-degree premeditated murder.

The inmate testified on behalf of the prosecution during the trial.

Defense attorney Diana Bare, who had argued that the scalding was an accident committed by a harried and overworked woman -- a woman with little education or resources -- was disappointed by the verdict, but not surprised.

"I respect the hard work the jury did, and I know it had to be very difficult for them," Bare said. "But until we as a culture offer women who are caregivers more support and better education, we will continue to see these kinds of incidences."

Oakland County Assistant Prosecutor Brett Chudler said after the hearing that Johnson had no one to blame but herself.

"I don't care how uneducated you are, how slow you are, how poor you are, there is no excuse for this. Only an animal would do something like this," he said.

The trial was heard by Oakland County Circuit Judge Rudy Nichols, who will also preside over the sentencing.

Contact L.L. BRASIER at 248-858-2262 or brasier@freepress.com.

Aunt: Only family present at drowning

Tuesday, July 05, 2005

JOE SNAPPERTHE SAGINAW NEWS

TUSCOLA -- The family of a 22-month-old who drowned as her mother sunbathed just feet away is calling the girl's death a tragic accident.

"It happened so fast," said Diane Tebedo, the aunt of 19-year-old Rachel M. Nobles, who was catching rays on a deck adjoined to an above-ground pool when Hailie A. Nobles drowned last week.

"Rachel can't believe it happened so fast."

"It was three adults on the deck," Tebedo said. "They don't know how she got up as quick as she did."

Tebedo, 43, of Tuscola described new details of the incident to The Saginaw News and questioned investigators' accounts in some cases.

Nobles, she said, was swimming with her daughter shortly before her death. When they were done, they got out and Nobles removed the child's life vest and swimming wings away from the pool, Tebedo said.

But when the teen mother went to relax on the deck, Hailie apparently grabbed the life vest, pulled it over herself and climbed back into the pool, Tebedo said.

"They found the life jacket in the pool," she said. "It wasn't snapped. She was too little to snap it, they figure."

Tebedo disputed Tuscola County sheriff's deputies' account of the incident as a family gathering. Instead, Tebedo said, Nobles was simply living with her aunt.

"They made it sound like it was a party," she said. "It wasn't like she wasn't being cared for. This is just killing Rachel."

Undersheriff James Jashinske said Friday that investigators don't believe criminal charges are forthcoming. Still, they have forwarded police reports to prosecutors and state Family Independence Agency officials for review, Jashinske said.

The child's funeral was to take place at 11 a.m. today at Martin Funeral Home in Vassar.

Special Additions

Child by child, family grows to nurture nine

DEERFIELD TOWNSHIP - LAPEER CO

THE FLINT JOURNAL FIRST EDITION

Sunday, July 03, 2005

By [Bernie Hillman](mailto:Bernie.Hillman@flintjournal.com) • 810.766.6378

DEERFIELD TWP. - After visiting the adopted children of Roger and Tammy Rudi for the first time, Dr. James Johnson pulled his car off the road and wept.

Brianna, 10, and Savannah, 8, are blind and can't walk.

Dylan, 10, Maxwell, 7, and Brianna are all hydrocephalic, having excess fluid on the brain, and Dylan also has cerebral palsy.

Myles, 5, has cystic fibrosis and is autistic.

Montgomery, 4, is bipolar and doesn't have any sweat glands.

Jayden, 4, is microcephalic, with a small head and brain.

The brain of Delaney, 2, did not divide into two hemispheres and she must use a wheelchair - although she's often carried now.

And since that day, the family has also adopted Mackenzie, 12 weeks old, who is also hydrocephalic.

Seven of the nine are fed through tubes in their stomachs. All are in diapers. Their conditions have all been called terminal.

"It reminded me of Haiti," said Johnson of Belleville, a former medical missionary, while recalling his first trip to the Rudi family, "but the kids would die there."

Instead, at their 15-bedroom, 12-bathroom house on Lobdell Lake, Roger and Tammy Rudi see to it that each of their nine special-needs children lives in a nurturing home with dignity.

For example, Brianna and Savannah can't see, but their bedroom is decorated in little-girl pink, white and with flowers. Ballerinas dance on the wall.

Nine pairs of tennis shoes are lined up on top of a room divider. Four locked cupboards hold a legion of medicine bottles.

Then there is the work that needs to be done: 40 feedings a day, six loads of laundry a day, all the diapers that need to be changed.

"Things get hard from time to time, but it does for every family," said Tammy Rudi. "There are moments I pray, 'God you've got to help me.'"

"There hasn't ever been a day I couldn't love them. Roger and I have a strong faith in God. Raising these kids is our mission field. Our hearts believe strongly in this."

One child, then another. What brought the newlyweds to make a place for kids with severe health problems 10 years ago started with the idea to start a family - a family that needed them. It was his first marriage and her second. Her three children - sons Michael McGue, 21, and Madison McGue, 17, and daughter Megan McGue, 20 - live with them, too.

Dylan was their first adopted son. He was born a triplet and was 14 months old when a friend told them about him.

"Once we got him in our arms, he was ours," Roger Rudi said.

Over the years, they heard of more babies families couldn't deal with.

The Rudis decided early on that they would adopt three. But they heard stories that broke their hearts, and they took in just one more, then another.

"Somewhere, we went beyond that and kept going. After it got to a certain point, one more didn't matter," said Tammy Rudi, 40.

"I see them as children first, not the disability. I think the birth family sees the disability - because they are so damaged."

"They belong here, bipolar and all," Roger Rudi, 45, said. "If they weren't here, they'd be in a foster home."

There are special things about each child that tug at Tammy and Roger Rudi.

Maxwell was premature and weighted 3 pounds when he was born. He suffered a severe stroke and nearly died. "They told us he would be blind and deaf and never walk or talk," Tammy Rudi said.

He does all that and much more.

Roger Rudi formed a special bond with Maxwell. He would travel to a Detroit-area hospital to hold him and talk to him.

"I picked him up and he smiled at me," he said. "I could hold him in one hand."

Savanna, who is paralyzed and has seizures, is of Mideastern descent.

"I think she is very beautiful," Tammy Rudi said.

She said Myles may be a savant.

"He is very bright," she said. "He taught himself Spanish. I'm helping him with French."

Mackenzie was born premature and 90 percent of her brain was fluid. She had surgery the first week with the Rudis.

None of the nine was supposed to live as long as they have.

"These kids are so fragile, (but) there is something special about each of them," she said.

They thrive, she surmises, on "love, acceptance and good care" and a circle of support.

"Everybody is on the same page that what makes this work - the doctors, the school, the therapists, our whole family unit," she said.

Son Madison McGue said there is no resentment toward his special-needs siblings.

"They are a lot of fun," he said and made Mackenzie laugh with a raspberry to the belly. "They fill up a lot of time taking care of them. It's a family thing."

Tammy's sister, Mary Piechowski of Fenton Township, is not surprised at her sister's devotion to the less fortunate.

"Our folks took in foster children for probably 30 years," said Piechowski, 54. "They'd have four and five kids in one family."

They weren't kids with special needs, though.

"Everybody is accepted. No one in our family thinks anything odd of it. You should see our Easter egg hunt," she said.

A day in the lifeThe Rudis were able to buy the vacated group home on Lobdell Lake five years ago when the owner slashed the price. The maze-like house has seen many add-ons.

Roger had a good job as a systems engineer, but after 23 years with Electronic Data Systems, he lost his job nine months ago through downsizing. He's working the night shift at a factory.

They get either a state or federal government subsidy for six of the nine children, with the checks being spent on food or other needs such as clothing. Four are on Medicaid - only five are covered by the Rudis' health insurance. The subsidy, based on difficulty of care, ranges between \$200 and \$2,000 a month.

They fought for years to get \$400 a month for Montgomery.

"He's going to have lifelong medical and dental problems," she said.

"It all goes back to the kids," she said of the subsidy checks, stroking a cheek of one child and planting a kiss on the forehead of another.

During the school year, days are structured and begin at 5:30 a.m. Now that school's out, she can sleep in another half hour.

"I change them, start feeding the kids, dress them," Tammy Rudi said. "Brianna is getting a breathing treatment while I'm catheterizing Savannah. I go and take care of the next one.

"I just run back and forth. Montgomery eating his yogurt. I have to suction Dylan, feed and dress Brianna and I give Savannah a breathing treatment. I'll feed Jaden, put him in his wheelchair. I brush their teeth and wash their faces, give Dylan a bottle, dress him, get him in his chair. They get their medications.

"I'm back to Savannah. She has to have layers of clothing. She can't regulate her body temperature. Before you know it, the baby is crying. I make her bottle, change her, pass her over to Megan."

By 7:15 a.m., she said Madison starts loading everyone on the Genesee Intermediate School District bus that takes seven of the children. Dylan, Savannah and Brianna attend the Crouse Instructional Center in Flushing. Montgomery and Jaden go to Special Service Center South in Flint. Maxwell and Myles will attend the Knopf Learning Center in Flint this fall. Delaney goes to Early On Childhood Services, also in Flint.

After spoon-feeding Maxwell and tube-feeding Myles, Tammy Rudi tries to get in a half hour nap.

Then there are beds to be made, baths to give, the house to clean and pick up. And that's on a day when there aren't any health-related appointments. "Some days I think I can't do it, then I see their little faces - what was I thinking? Love makes it OK," Tammy Rudi said.

Johnson, a doctor with Genesee Mobile Physicians, makes a once-a-month stop, but with this many health problems under one roof, he checks on the Rudis more often. Before she met him, a doctor visit was a logistical nightmare.

"One would get sick and she would take (them) all," he said.

On a recent visit, he brought Darthia Virgin with Home Health Care Inc. to evaluate the home and see about getting the Rudis some help.

"They won't ask for it," Johnson said. "Tammy does all the housework, cooking and laundry."

The Rudis find the energy to do respite care for several families of other special-needs children so those families can go on a vacation, to an appointment or to take a break, she said. The Rudis take mental health breaks, too. Sometimes it's just a night in a motel.

Still, Tammy Rudi is uncomfortable talking about the rare glaucoma that could eventually take her sight.

"I don't want people to feel sorry for me," she said. "I've been living with it. As long as I can get around my house, I'm good."

"I want to see what the future holds for these guys. I want them to be productive adults, and we will do anything in our power to see that happen."

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QUICK TAKE

Tammy's tips

Wondering how the Rudis do it? Here's advice we solicited from Tammy Rudi about family life: Get organized. You have to be "on schedule ... on task all the time," Rudi said. Making lists helps, she said, "I'm thinking for about 14 people."

Set priorities. At the Rudis' home, the kids' health and well-being is tops. Other things can wait. "When the kids go to bed, that's when I can think to do my adult things," Rudi said. For example, she recently was doing bills at 3 a.m.

Don't take it personally. When child blowups and bad behaviors happen, "You have to stand back and say they can't help it," Rudi said. Stay calm and composed; kids react to rising tensions.

Know the zone. Learn and respect your kids' comfort zones. Rudi gave examples of

realizing her kids were becoming agitated when their home was getting lots of visitors, and recognizing that one of her daughters does not like being placed on her back. Be prepared financially. When the Rudis saw Roger's co-workers being laid off, they began saving more and spending less. The result was readiness when Roger was downsized.

Enjoy the everyday. Tammy Rudi said even with scores of routine daily caregiving duties, she doesn't let mothering seem like work all the time. For example, she'll use feeding times to read stories. "It's still your family," she said. "You laugh, you play."

Helps our seniors

Saturday, July 02, 2005

Kalamazoo Gazette Editorial

Sometimes the elderly get shuffled to the margins of society.

Colleen Simpson works to pull them back into the mix.

"I think they're incredible," she said. "I have a terrific respect for all the elderly in our communities."

Simpson, 58, is the coordinator of Older Adult Resource Services at South County Community Services in Vicksburg, an agency that provides free Medicare and Medicaid assistance to the elderly and their families and caregivers.

Believing that knowledge provides people with dignity, Simpson set out to educate the older population in her community about their Medicare and Medicaid benefit rights.

This effort led to her being chosen recently to receive the Outreach Award from the Michigan Medicare/Medicaid Assistance Program in recognition of her outstanding service to the program.

Simpson has been a MMAP counselor for the past four years, and added that she does so because the more she educates seniors about their benefit rights, the more independent they can become.

"We need to provide seniors with the information they need to live their lives the way they want to," she said.

Simpson was born in Flint and moved to Kalamazoo when she was 12. After attending Monsignor O'Brien High School (now Hackett Catholic Central) she began working in the business office at Bronson Methodist Hospital, where her desire to help seniors began.

"I remember as I worked in that office and saw older people come into the hospital for care that I wanted to be an advocate for seniors," she said.

After a 23-year stint at Bronson, her desire to help led her to enroll at Spring Arbor University, where she graduated in 1998 with a Health Management and Service degree with a certificate in gerontology.

She said she couldn't have done it without the help of her husband of 35-years, Patrick, who worked extra-hard while she was going to school.

When asked why she enjoys working with seniors so much, Simpson said the reason was simple.

"I think they are the greatest generation we have," she said. "Our society today doesn't put an importance on the same things they do, the less tangible things, like hard-work and determination."

And character. Simpson said that she is especially fond of older women, who suffered through the Great Depression, World War II and their struggle integrating into the workforce, all the while doing what they had to do and never complaining, she said.

"Older adults need to teach us what they know before they go," she said. "Our society is in great need of the lessons they can teach us about character and integrity."

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Women's gala raises hope

Annual fund-raiser helps ensure children in low-income families aren't left behind

By Kate Lawson / The Detroit News
July 5, 2005

Becky Joseph has never met Carol Walters, Debi Hart, Maureen Saxton, Melissa Cragg or Terri Haas Wittmann, but these women along with the rest of the 19-member Women's Caring Program board have made a huge difference in her life, and she wants them to know she's grateful.

"Without them I would drown," says the 26-year-old single mother from Jackson. "They have helped me in a way that I can never repay, and I don't know what I would have done without them," she says, her voice shaky with emotion.

Every year, the members of the Women's Caring Program (WCP) host an event called the Twilight Gathering at Carol Walters' country estate, Meadowview, in Milford. Mothers, daughters, sisters, colleagues and friends come from across the state and even the country to celebrate friendship and raise funds for the ChildCare Commitment program. The funds allow the WCP to provide safe, licensed and more affordable child care through one-year grants to more than 100 low-income working families such as Joseph's.

Last year, the event raised more than \$200,000 and brought the WCP's total fund-raising efforts to more than \$1 million.

"Because of them, my daughter, Calista, is enrolled in a wonderful child-care program," says Joseph, who works a 40-hour week as an accounts payable clerk. "I don't get any child support. I come to tears when I think that I couldn't do this without some help."

Kaylin Dillard of Shelby Township echoes Joseph's sentiments.

Dillard, the 35-year-old single mother of Jaylin, 2, collects no child support and drives almost three hours each day to and from her job as a claims adjuster for American Fellowship Mutual Insurance Co. in Southfield. She says her \$200 per week child-care bills along with her \$720 per month rent pretty much exhausts her earnings. "It took me a long time to get this job. I live from check to check," she says. "I guess I could quit (my job) and get something part-time so I could qualify for assistance, but I want to earn my way. It's frustrating. Without WCP, I could never afford day care for Jaylin."

And it's all because of a little cocktail party 26 years ago. "We just wanted to make new friends outside of work," says Carol Walters, explaining that back in the late '70s, she, Debi Hart and Gwen Stireman were all working 12-hour days in the State Commerce Department in Lansing when they decided to get together.

About the event

What: 26th Annual Women's Caring Program Twilight Gathering, a benefit for ChildCare Commitment.

Where: Meadowview, home of Carol Walters, 2955 Morrow Lane, Milford.

When: 5:30-8 p.m. July 14.

Cost: Individual tickets to the event are \$75; corporate donors are welcome.

Information: For further information and/or to RSVP to the event, contact Melissa Cragg at MCragg@TheFisherGrp.com; or visit WomensCaringProgram.org.

"Gwen and I each invited a couple of friends, and eight of us met on Carol's front porch in Lansing," says Hart. "We enjoyed wine, cheese and some great conversation."

"We had no idea what it would become," says Walters, WCP's founder and president who left state government and is now a financial consultant. Indeed, what was once a simple celebration of wine, women and great food blossomed into a hefty nonprofit organization helping low-income families. And they're still having fun.

Fast forward more than a quarter century later and the little cocktail party (as a matter of full disclosure, the WCP playfully stood for "Women's Cocktail Party") of eight has become an annual event with hundreds of women attending. Walters lives in Milford now, and every year, she opens up her 10-acre estate for this glorious event, which ensures that after the sun sets, glasses and plates are cleared, the silent-auction items are snatched up and the tents dismantled, 115 low-income working families will get some much-deserved and needed help.

"I know I've been there," says Shelly Mazur of Royal Oak, a WCP board member. "I was divorced with two toddlers, no means of support and my car broke down. I honestly don't know how I survived, there was nothing like WCP to help me. That's why I feel so passionate about this group. I want to do all I can to help," says Mazur, who managed as a single mom for six years and is now happily remarried and runs a successful mushroom business.

Mazur's fellow board of directors is a powerful group of women who meet at Walters' home five times a year to plan this event. They are business women and moms, graphic designers, financial consultants, accountants, bankers, lobbyists and a certified chef from across the state and beyond (Lansing, Detroit, Royal Oak, Holt, Okemos, Chicago and even Bermuda). They gather around Walters' dining room table, sip wine, nosh on salads and brownies and get down to business.

They talk about contributors, who to approach, gathering items for the massive silent auction, go over the budget, discuss the issue of port-o-potties (this will be the first year) and, at the urging of one board member, talk about policy. "Policy? What policy?" laughs Walters.

"We want to make money here, and yes, we want to have a party -- that's our policy."

Helping make the event a success is Chef Mary Brady, who runs the popular Diamond Jim Brady Bistro in Novi along with her husband, Tom. When she first joined the board of Women's Caring Program 10 years ago, she catered the event for the 70 women who attended. "Piece of cake," she says.

Even though Brady will be cooking for 10 times that many this year, she doesn't bat an eye.

"Things have changed a little bit, though. I used to do all the grilling on site," laughs Brady and at the same time shuddering at the thought of grilling for 700. "One year, it rained and we carried a lit grill into the garage. Can you imagine?"

"When we first started, I think we served wine, cheese and crackers," says Walters. "Then it was casseroles. Everyone brought a dish to share."

These days, there's nary a casserole in sight. This year, Brady and her staff will prepare 2,000 hors d'oeuvres including gazpacho and Michigan blueberry soup "shooters" -- icy soup served in single shot glasses for a quick quench and blast of berries -- Brady's famous chicken salad served in phyllo tarts, a mushroom pate and a smoked salmon appetizer. And that's just for starters.

There will be an extensive antipasto bar featuring cheeses, hummus, olives, salsa and a variety of sushi, and a huge summer salad bar will offer seven salads including grilled tuna, roasted asparagus, sweet rock shrimp and curried chicken.

"We couldn't do this event without Mary," says Walters. "Because of her generous purveyors and her amazing talent, it's a huge success every single year. She can serve 200 or she can serve 600, I've never seen a difference in what she has to offer and how she does it."

The Women's Caring Program Twilight Gathering has become such a popular event, even the men want to get involved. And they pay a hefty price for the honor.

"About the third year, the party really started to grow, and we needed a bartender, so I asked my friend Bob Bowman (former State of Michigan treasurer) to help out," Walters says.

"Of course he said 'yes.' Then other men wanted to join in the fun. We make them wear shorts, tuxedo shirts, bow ties, and even the special aprons with our logo, and they love it," she says.

"But here's the best part, on top of that, we originally charged each of them \$1,000 to participate, and they jumped at it."

Walters says about 17 men participate who are corporate executives and from companies that make contributions. "I even told Pete (Walters' husband) he couldn't volunteer unless he put in \$1,000. Now the price tag is \$2,500 and nobody dropped off," she says incredulously. "One company even donated \$5,000 so two of its executives could volunteer. They come from everywhere, New York, Philadelphia, Chicago, Washington, D.C., Boston, and boy do they ever work," Walters says. "They do it all and come back year after year after year. I can't believe it. They pass hors d'oeuvres, pour wine and help with all the clean-up. They never stop, not even to eat, they're just amazing."

Even more amazing is that every year the attendance grows and grows. The idea to bring a friend and have some fun, and oh, yes, support a great cause is all the enticement needed. By invite and word of mouth, attorneys, judges, sports players, college vice-presidents and elected officials (Gov. Jennifer Granholm attended the event in 2003) converge on Walters' gorgeously landscaped estate.

Last year, the event drew 600 women and a record-setting 700 are expected this year.

"Carol is just amazing," says Debi Hart. "This whole event is because of her, she's the force behind it all. Every year, she opens up her home and makes sure this event is a success." That's a sentiment shared by each and every board member.

Still, Walters is quick to turn the praise back to the board. "They are the ones who deserve the credit. This couldn't get done without them.

"Looking back," she says, "I'd like to think that our daughters and sons have grown up now only watching their mothers create and grow a successful volunteer organization committed to helping others less fortunate but also witnessing how powerful the bonds of friendship can be."

You can reach Kate Lawson at (313) 222-6026 or klawson@detnews.com.

More Money For Low-Income Child Care Providers

Licensed or registered child care providers serving low-income families have access to \$661,371 more grant dollars, thanks to a new grant program funded by the Department of Human Services (DHS) and supported by the Michigan 4H.

Thursday, Gov. Jennifer **Granholt** approved the Enhanced Quality Improvement Program (EQUIP), a program designed to award 173 grants ranging from \$1,000 - \$5,000, to child care providers working with low-income families.

“Quality care can help ensure our children get the great start in life they deserve,” Granholt said.

Grants are issued to new providers as a means to increase low-income child care throughout the state. EQUIP includes start up funds for 30 new providers. So far, 18 counties have received start up money.

Existing providers also receive grants to build child care capacity, support childhood development and to improve staff knowledge and caregiver techniques. Grant money helps develop weekend programs as well as before school and after school programs which are highly desired by low-income families.

In February, the DHS awarded nearly \$200,000 to 60 child care providers. From fiscal year 1998 through the current funding cycle, DHS distributed more than \$7.6 million in EQUIP grants.

For more information about the program, or to view current grantees, go to www.michigan.gov/dhs.

Livingston County Briefs

Detroit News

July 5, 2005

Grant request for at-risk kids OK'd

The Livingston Educational Service Agency recently approved a grant application concerning child development services to at-risk 4-year-olds and their families.

The LESA board approved sending the application for \$356,400 to the state. The money would be for Oct. 1 through Sept. 30, 2006.

Chief honored for efforts to keep kids out of trouble

Kelly Nankervis, Midland Daily News
07/04/2005

Midland Police Chief Jim St. Louis has been honored for his interest in keeping kids out of trouble.

On Wednesday, St. Louis was presented with the Fight Crime: Invest in Kids "Crime Fighter Award" at the Michigan Association of Chiefs of Police yearly summer training conference in Lansing.

According to a media release from the organization, the award is to recognize St. Louis' efforts to help the public and lawmakers understand the best way to fight crime is the programs that are meant to keep kids out of trouble in the first place.

"He has been a tremendous advocate for investments in high-quality preschool, high-quality after-school programs, child abuse and neglect prevention and programs that get troubled kids back on track," stated Dr. Joseph E. Thomas Jr., Southfield Police chief and co-chairman of the organization.

Fight Crime: Invest in kids is a statewide crime prevention non-profit organization. It is led by more than 330 of Michigan's police chiefs, sheriffs, prosecutors and crime survivors.

To learn more, go to www.fightcrime.org.

Livingston Briefs

Detroit News

July 5, 2005

Garden Tour to help women's shelter

Tickets for the seventh annual Garden Tour sponsored by LACASA, the county's shelter for abused women and children, are still on sale.

The shelter is looking for volunteers to help with the tour. It will be from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Saturday and Sunday and will feature gardens throughout Livingston County. The event raises funds for LACASA's efforts to help victims of domestic violence, sexual assault and child abuse. Tickets for the tour are \$12 in advance or \$15 during the tour weekend. For information, call (517) 548-1350.

A Child Is Waiting

James, 11, likes writing, baseball, cartoons

By Rosemary Dorr / Special to The Detroit News

Tuesday, June 28, 2005

Looking happy, James reports he graduated into the sixth grade. "It's a good feeling," he says. The 11-year-old is a friendly boy who enjoys being helpful and has only one dislike. "I don't like squash," James says.

He likes to play outdoors, skate, watch cartoons ("all of them") and play baseball (his "biggest wish"), and he keeps trying to do his best.

"Everybody loves James," says his therapist at the residence where he has lived for about two years. "He gets along with peers and staff, is very good at following directions, knows what to do and does it. He's excellent in school (where he's in a special education classroom for children with learning disabilities). His teachers say he has come a long way in reading and is very creative in writing stories. James does all his homework and even likes to help other boys with theirs."

Shy and quiet, until he knows people, James beams at the praise.

"He's a great kid," says his adoption worker. "Although he needs help in school and one-on-one attention, he presents no (behavior) problems. He should keep in contact with his younger brother, also in foster care."

Might you consider becoming the loving, patient and committed family James needs? Please talk with Kelli Crawford at Orchards Children's Services, (248) 593-2196.

Last column's child: Tony, 8, energetic, "sweet and adorable," responds to attention and structure. For information, call Kyana Houston at Judson Center, (313) 794-5653, ext. 282. *A child is waiting appears Tuesdays in Features.*

Letters to the Editor

July 4, 2005
Detroit News

Give Blue Cross surplus back to customers

Surplus isn't a cookie jar

What an appalling front-page headline: "Blues told to **give up surplus**" (June 17). State Sen. Shirley Johnson wants the **Blue Cross Blue Shield surplus** to go toward Medicaid. Undoubtedly it is true that the Blues shouldn't have such a **surplus**. But has the senator forgotten whose money it is? I don't remember receiving a reimbursement from the state to pay for my family's **Blue Cross Blue Shield**. Its **surplus** isn't a new cookie jar for under funded state programs. If the Blues are over funded, shouldn't the **surplus** go **back** to those who paid the premiums in the first place?

Fr. Gene Geromel
Swartz Creek

Plan is discrimination

I resent the government taking money I paid in premiums and redistributing it to a cause they should have funded with tax dollars. It is discrimination against people who have **Blue Cross Blue Shield** insurance. While I have some concern about the size of the cushion that **Blue Cross Blue Shield** has in its "rainy day fund," the Legislature would not be looking for ways to punish businesses with enough foresight and planning to establish such a fund if it had not squandered the state's **surplus**.

Greg Geisler
Howell

Johnson should be ashamed

State Sen. Shirley Johnson should be ashamed of herself and her continued request to redistribute the alleged **Blue Cross** reserves of \$2.2 billion. The reserves, if they exist at all, are a product of the employers who may have been overcharged over the past three to five years during the accumulation period.

To attempt to raid the reserves and pass them on to fill more state budget holes is hard to fathom. Rebate the reserves to the employers so they may somehow be able to continue to offer these benefits to their hard working employees.

Darrell D. Sobeski
Northville

Premiums too high

How is it that the government can claim it? If there is a \$2.2 billion **surplus**, the obvious conclusion is that the premiums were too high and the **customers** should get it **back**.

J. B. Conrad
Farmington Hills

Blue Cross isn't welfare

Blue Cross Blue Shield is not a state welfare program. Welfare is the state's problem. If in fact **Blue Cross Blue Shield** has an excessive **surplus**, the excess should be returned to premium payers in a lump sum payment.

Jon Rilett
St. Helen

Mental-health clients to get medical care

Sunday, July 03, 2005

By Barbara Waltersbwalters

kalamazoo Gazette.com 388-8576

Medical and psychiatric services will be coordinated in Kalamazoo beginning this week for people with chronic mental illnesses.

Once a week, Dr. Rockelle Rogers, medical director of the Family Health Center Inc. on West Paterson Street, will come to the Kalamazoo Community Mental Health & Substance Abuse Services site on West Kalamazoo Avenue. In turn, the mental-health center's chief medical officer, Dr. Gopal Bedi, will provide on-site consultation at the Family Health Center.

The idea is to link people with mental illness, many of whom do not have primary-care physicians, with a source of medical care and referrals, said Jeff Patton, executive director of Kalamazoo Community Mental Health.

The Family Health Center is the area's designated community-health center, subsidized with federal funding and boosted through sources such as the Greater Kalamazoo United Way and Kalamazoo County Human Services Department. The center accepts Medicaid, the sole insurer for about 70 percent of the people who are regular consumers at Kalamazoo Community Mental Health, Patton said.

Because of the national Medicaid funding crisis, many primary-care physicians outside the center do not accept Medicaid, Patton said.

About 40 percent of the 300 people who regularly receive medication for mental illness at the clinic on Kalamazoo Avenue do not have a regular primary-care physician, Patton said.

"So it makes very good sense to partner with Family Health," Patton said. The new partnership will target those 300 people at first, although it may expand.

The new arrangement will help people with mental illness who cannot find primary-care physicians and encourage those who simply haven't tried to find doctors, Patton said.

Mental illness makes having a regular physician even more important than usual, he said.

"Nationally, persons with mental illness typically have shorter life spans. Some of it relates to poor access to care, plus the side effects of medications over the years that can damage the liver and other parts of the body."

A Massachusetts study found that adults with mental illness were about twice as likely to have multiple medical disorders as adults without mental illness, Patton said. People with mental illness also are more likely to have multiple physical problems.

Poor nutrition, high rates of smoking and sedentary lifestyles are factors that place people with mental illness at a greater risk for serious physical disorders such as diabetes, cardiovascular disease, stroke, arthritis and certain types of cancer, he said.

Because of the link between mental and physical illnesses, coordinating services to treat them "is a national trend," Patton said.

About 4,500 people in Kalamazoo get services from Kalamazoo Community Mental Health.

There are no real financial incentives of the integration of primary care and psychiatric care, because there is no documentation that combining the two saves money. Nor are there state or federal financial incentives to coordinate the two services, according to Patton. The reason for the local effort is to "provide better health care to the people we serve," he said.

"I cannot emphasize enough how significant this partnership is," Patton said. "We try to get people into (affordable) housing and integrated into community. But now we are helping them get access to primary care that really helps them live longer lives."

Anthony King, chief executive officer of Family Health Center, agreed.

"This will further our strategic goal of expanding services to the medically underinsured and uninsured" in Kalamazoo County, he said.

Group to study housing needs

Task force looks at homeless shelters, funding

By SHANNON MURPHY
Times Herald
July 5, 2005

Delores Thomason's homeless shelter has been open for a little more than a month, and she already needs more beds.

As with most homeless shelters in the area, Thomason's shelter, Mother Hill's House of Hope in Port Huron, needs funding.

Thomason is part of a task force led by St. Clair County Commissioner Pam Wall, D-Algonac. The committee, authorized by the county Board of Commissioners, has a goal of determining the needs of homelessness in the county, how to deal with it and how to pay for it. It meets for the third time later this week.

The task force is made up of community members, shelter officials and county commissioners. Wall said the task force's goal is to have a plan in place by September.

"Right now we are gathering information," said Wall, who also is a board member for Safe Horizons, which operates shelters in the city.

"What we needed ... was to have a firm number on how many beds we need in the county for emergency shelter and come up with a definition of what is the person that requires emergency shelter," she said.

Dave Arnold is glad to see community members trying to help shelters. Arnold is unemployed and has been staying at Mother Hill's until he can find a job and a place to live. He said while the shelter needs funding, it also needs community support, an aspect he hopes the task force considers.

"We have to have the people (in the community) stand behind it," he said, adding people could donate or volunteer time. "We need a little bit of everything."

Wall said the biggest problem is shelters having to turn people away because there is no room. With high unemployment rates locally and in Michigan, more people are finding themselves unable to pay rent and bills.

Wall said funding is dwindling, especially state and local funding - this year the county did not contribute to local emergency shelters.

"It costs money because you have to have a staff and be there 24/7," she said, adding Heritage House, Safe Horizon's emergency shelter, which only is open from November to April, costs \$55,000 a year to run.

"It's not inexpensive," she said.

Contact Shannon Murphy at (810) 989-6274 or semurphy@gannett.com.

Originally published July 5, 2005

Seasonal searchers push up jobless rate

About 500 more area residents were out of work in May than in April due to an increase in workers looking for seasonal work.

ctslat@monroenews.com

07/3/2005

By CHARLES SLAT

Monroe County's unemployment rate rose to 6.3 percent in May as a flood of seasonal workers began looking for summer jobs.

The area labor force grew by 1,200 between April and May, rising to 79,800. About 5,000 were out of work, compared to 4,500 in April, when the unemployment rate was 5.8 percent. But the May rate was unchanged from May, 2004.

"This time of year, many individuals enter Michigan's labor market in search of seasonal and summer employment," said Richard H. Waclawek, director of the Bureau of Labor Market Information & Strategic Initiatives. "This labor force influx typically produces in May an increase in the number of persons finding and seeking jobs."

A statewide monthly survey of employers showed job gains in leisure and hospitality services (up 21,000), construction (up 13,000), retail trade (up 8,000) and in professional and business services (up 7,000). Manufacturing employment increased statewide by 6,000 in May.

Total government employment was down by 3,000 over the month, and state government education employment declined by 15,000 due to the end of the winter and spring semesters at colleges and universities.

The majority of the manufacturing increase in May was in the Detroit metropolitan area due to recalls from short-term layoffs in the auto industry. However, the boost in manufacturing employment over the month was tempered somewhat by auto-related layoffs of around 1,000 in the Lansing/East Lansing area, state officials said.

A little more than half of Michigan's 83 counties recorded unemployment rate decreases in May. The May numbers left Monroe County with the 17th lowest rate among the 83 counties.

From April to May, the Detroit area's rate rose from 7.1 to 7.2 percent, and statewide unemployment rose from 5.8 to 6.3 percent in the same period.

Keyword: News

Migrant school rules tightened

Enrollment down in Flint, other places

FLINT

THE FLINT JOURNAL FIRST EDITION

Tuesday, July 05, 2005

By Matt Bachmbach@flintjournal.com • 810.766.6330

FLINT - Some families that once participated in Flint's summer migrant education program can no longer do so.

Migrant families are moving less frequently, and Flint and other programs now must screen migrant families before they get free services, such as summer education, said Anna Maria Hufton, director of the summer migrant program for the Flint School District.

Last year, Flint's program had 187 students, but this year it has just 95 students in pre-kindergarten through 12th grades, Hufton said.

Fewer students means a smaller budget and staff, but Hufton has tried to maintain services to the children in the nine classes - down from 11 in 2004 - this year at Williams Elementary School, 3501 Minnesota Ave.

"It's pretty sad," Hufton said. "We say we try to do our very best and not impact the kids. "Being a migrant worker is a very honorable job. If they want to be a migrant worker when they grow up like their parents, that's fine, but we want them to have an education to be able to have that choice."

Flint isn't alone. The Mid-Michigan Migrant program covering Montcalm and Ionia counties has 47 students enrolled so far, but had 110 last year. And the Northwestern Michigan program out of Traverse City had 267 students last year and so far 127 this year.

All the programs are expected to gain students as the summer progresses and more migrants move into the area to work on farms harvesting various crops. Some programs, such as the ones in Detroit and Grand Rapids, are expecting growth this year because of an influx of migrant workers in their areas or more aggressive recruiting efforts.

Hufton said she received \$116,000 in federal money for the six-week program this year, down \$85,000 from last year. Hufton expects the enrollment numbers to increase in future years because there is an influx of migrant families moving in the area, but many of their children are not yet school age.

Hufton tried to make cuts that didn't impact students, but wasn't always able to do so. Tabitha Price teaches students in grades seven through 12 and said this year she had to cancel a field trip to Cranbrook in Bloomfield Hills, where the children learn about theater, science and other areas. Hufton said she is still trying to get the funds to pay for the Cranbrook field trip.

They also had to reduce the number of students who will attend a weeklong camp at Michigan State University. They normally send 20 students, but this year can afford only 15.

"We can't do all the things we want to do, and it's unfortunate because these are opportunities many of these students would not get otherwise," Price said.

The Flint migrant program, which was started in 1983 with 44 students, teaches the core subjects and offers students breakfast and lunch, weekly field trips, weekly lessons from officials from Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts, and a variety of services, including dental hygiene.

One reason for the enrollment decline is that migrant families are moving less frequently. To qualify for the free summer education program, a family's main income must be based on temporary work tied to the agriculture industry, such as picking tomatoes or packing poultry.

"It ... has to be temporary work. It can't be a steady job," Hufton said.

Helping agencies set right example for local governments

*Web-posted Jul 3, 2005
The Oakland Press*

Less than a week ago it was announced that the Food Bank of Oakland County and the Gleaners Community Food Bank of Southeast Michigan had merged.

They say they'll be able to feed more people with the same amount of money. That makes sense. There will be one group of administrators in charge instead of two.

The donors to the food banks will get more bang for their bucks and more hungry folks will be helped.

And not long before that combination was revealed, the two Southeast Michigan United Way agencies reinvented themselves as one.

The United Way of Oakland County and Detroit-based United Way Community Services dissolved their organizations and formed the United Way for Southeast Michigan. Again, greater effectiveness is the goal and surely will be the result. The United Way of Oakland County had been Pontiac based.

Late last year in another merger of non-governmental human services organizations, the Oakland Livingston Human Services agency and Community Services of Oakland became one. The first had served the northern part of the county and the other the southern.

Such mergers bring these organizations into the 21st century. North and south Oakland County no longer are separate communities. Pontiac once was city surrounded by farmland; now it is a part of a megalopolis that is a seamless mass of urban development. It includes Detroit and contiguous communities stretching south halfway to Toledo and east, north and west to the county boundaries and beyond.

The officials of these helping organizations no doubt saw the wisdom of ending needless and costly divisions. But it's likely that strong suggestions also came from major donors who didn't want to support unnecessary administrative costs when the money could better go to people in need.

This logic also easily could be applied to the innumerable local governments that carve this area into more than 250 separate municipal fiefdoms.

The money to be saved by the combining of humanitarian organizations would pale in comparison to the fiscal efficiencies that could be realized by a merging of local governmental services.

In this age of easy and instant sharing of data, there is little reason to maintain offices all over the map. Much of the heavy lifting in such areas as property tax administration already is consolidated behind the scenes at the county level.

And how many mayors, supervisors, chiefs of police, fire chiefs, public works directors, clerks, treasurers and so forth do we really need - especially at wages exceeding those of most of the taxpayers?

As in the case of the helping agencies, there once were physical reasons for keeping decision-making centers close at hand. But the value of proximity has been receding since the automobile was invented, not to mention the Internet.

The agencies have seen the light.

When will we demand similar enlightenment of our elected officials?

Keep in mind that in just five years we'll have to vote on whether to convene a constitutional convention in Michigan. Fundamental changes can be made then. Let's make sure we don't miss the opportunity.

THE OAKLAND PRESS

United Way allocation begins \$5.9 million to be distributed to agencies for 2005-06 program year

Monday, July 4, 2005

BY LIZ COBBS

Ann Arbor News Staff Reporter

About three years ago the Ann Arbor Center for Independent Living, an agency that assists people with disabilities and their families, formed a youth council.

The five-member group came up with ideas for social and recreational events for other young people ages 14-21 who have disabilities, but its funding ran out last year.

Facing the possibility of another year without money, the organization was pleasantly surprised to learn recently that the Washtenaw United Way included \$4,000 in its \$39,989 allocation to AACIL this year to help maintain the program.

"This has helped us out a lot and we're sure this will have an impact on the lives of our youth," said Dana Emerson, the center's youth services manager.

The center's funding is part of the \$5.9 million the Washtenaw United Way plans to allocate during the 2005-06 program year, which began Friday. The total amount of money being distributed is 6.3 percent less than last year's amount, \$6.3 million.

Campaign leaders announced in September that the campaign would be more than a half-million dollars below the \$8.3 million raised in 2003. The 2004 goal was set after the campaign committee went to local companies to ask what they believed they could raise this year, taking into consideration the needs of the community.

In January, campaign leaders announced the agency topped its \$7.86 million goal for the 2004 campaign by raising \$7.9 million. The official campaign total has since been adjusted to \$7.7 million to reflect some national headquarters of local companies making donations directly to other United Way chapters or nonprofit agencies.

Of the \$7.7 million, \$5.9 million will be distributed for 2005-06. Of the \$5.9 million, the board approved allocating \$3.28 million to the 35 local United Way-member agencies and three community affiliates in Dexter, Milan and Saline.

The distribution amount also includes \$2.64 million designated by donors to specific nonprofit agencies, down 8 percent from last year's designation amount of \$2.89 million.

Funding for some of the agencies will decrease while other nonprofit organizations will see an increase. For instance, Michigan Ability Partners will receive \$88,840, which includes an additional \$50,000 to provide job readiness and employment services to ex-offenders in Washtenaw County who were previously served by the Options Center, which closed in early 2004.

HelpSource, an agency that provides substance abuse education, foster care, Big Brothers/Big Sisters mentoring and other services for at-risk youths, will see a 5 percent decrease this year, from \$439,677 to \$415,287. Even with the decrease, HelpSource still received the most Washtenaw United Way funding for its more than 12 programs that serve all age groups - from babies to older adults.

"We have been very appreciative of their support all along," said David Shoup, coordinator for the Supervised Parenting-Exchange program in which HelpSource acts as neutral ground for parents requiring supervision when they visit their children or when children are exchanged from one parent to another.

What's difficult about United Way fundraisers is that they're primarily work-based campaigns and influenced by a number of factors, such as companies getting smaller, layoff threats and more ways for workers to give their donations to nonprofit agencies, said Washtenaw United Way Board Chairman Dan Foss.

For the current program year, the total funding requests from United Way-funded agencies was about \$900,000 more than the United Way had to give, Foss said.

"It's an agonizing job for volunteers to go through and look at \$4 million in requests and only have \$3 million to allocate," Foss said.

Recommendations on how much to allocate each year are made by 70 volunteers serving on the United Way's fund distribution panels and the fund distribution policy committee. The volunteers visit the agencies in February and March to review their programs and effectiveness. The United Way's board of directors gives final approval on allocations.

Liz Cobbs can be reached at lcobbs@annarbornews.com or (734) 994-6810.

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Top 10 agencies receiving money

Monday, July 4, 2005

Ann Arbor News

The following are the top 10 agencies receiving funding from the Washtenaw United Way for 2005-06:

- HelpSource, \$415,287.
- Corner Health Center, \$220,282.
- Catholic Social Services of Washtenaw County, \$218,982.
- American Red Cross Washtenaw County Chapter, \$205,584.
- SOS Community Services, \$181,136.
- SAFE House Center, \$180,500.
- Perry Nursery School, \$144,163.
- Huron Valley Boys & Girls Club, \$143,807.
- Peace Neighborhood Center, \$112,610.
- Salvation Army of Washtenaw County, \$102,752.

Letters to the Editor

Battle Creek Enquirer
July 5, 2005

Appalled by lack of compassion

I am appalled at the lack of compassion exhibited by Tom Lowe ("No one is stealing from so-called 'poor'," June 29) regarding "poor" people who "don't have jobs." Perhaps he could educate himself on regulations for receiving "handouts," since the majority of people using public assistance ARE working. As Americans, we are generous and value *helping others* as part of our moral principles.

He stated that he hasn't "used any unearned amount from any government or organization." Did he go to a state college/university or will he use Medicare? The government provides a vast spectrum of services, and although I personally haven't utilized the "free health care, food or welfare" services Mr. Lowe called "handouts," not everyone who needs to, does so because of "bad decisions." What bad decision did the stay-at-home mother make when her husband divorced her? Might she need assistance? How would you propose someone better themselves if they *have* made a bad decision? Or is it just too bad? No forgiveness, no second chances? Ironically, Mr. Lowe is showing his support for Republicans, most of whom *claim* to be Christians, for which forgiveness is fundamental!

As Christians, we are required to epitomize compassion, generosity and forgiveness, not judgment and score-keeping, regardless of political affiliation. In Deuteronomy 15:11, it states that "There will always be poor people in the land . . . be open-handed toward your brothers and toward the poor and needy in your land." Perhaps an unfortunate event would create a need, and hopefully Mr. Lowe will be shown the compassion and forgiveness that he didn't show for someone else.

Emily Meier
Battle Creek

Infant death studies at risk

State officials propose trimming or eliminating \$1 million devoted to reducing the rate for blacks.

Sunday, July 3, 2005

By Kim Kozlowski / The Detroit News

Funds to help 11 Michigan counties that have the highest African-American infant mortality rates are on the chopping block in next year's state budget. More than \$1 million in the state's Healthy Michigan Fund is proposed to be cut in half or eliminated in the 2006 budget. The money currently goes toward education and investigation into the disparity between black and white infants in counties where the problem is most severe -- including Wayne, Oakland and Macomb, where black infants die far more often than white babies.

"It's very shortsighted," said Betty Yancey, nurse consultant for Michigan Nurse Family Partnership, which oversees efforts to curb infant mortality. "We end up spending more money down the road. You either pay now or pay later."

The Healthy Michigan Fund, supported by state tobacco tax revenue, currently provides about \$43 million to projects like education in diabetes, Alzheimer's disease and physical fitness. The \$1 million commitment to infant mortality programs from tobacco tax revenue was made for the first time this year. The Senate has proposed cutting the allocation to \$500,000, while the House has proposed diverting the \$1 million to the state's Medicaid program.

"We did that because we thought it better to move the money to the Medicaid program, which allows for direct treatment of our poorer citizens," said Matt Resch, spokesman for House Speaker Craig DeRoche, R-Novi.

"We also actually get more money back from Washington for this commitment to Medicaid, so we thought it was prudent."

Gov. Jennifer Granholm proposed no cuts to infant mortality funding in her version of the 2006 budget. She has recommended continuing to spend the \$1 million on infant mortality programs, said Nancy Duncan, deputy director of the governor's budget office.

"While the House and the Senate took this Healthy Michigan money from infant mortality, it doesn't mean they are increasing or even maintaining the current level of Medicaid funding, either," she said.

"They are proposing cuts there as well."

More than 1,000 infants die every year before their first birthday in Michigan, giving the state the third-worst infant mortality rate in the nation.

The problem is particularly egregious if the infants are black and born in suburbs, especially wealthy Oakland County, a Detroit News analysis last year showed. Black infants in suburban Wayne, Oakland and Macomb counties die nearly four times more often than white infants.

In each community, there is a host of reasons why so many infants die before their first birthday, but not all deaths are explainable, experts say.

Women who don't plan their pregnancy or lack adequate prenatal care or engage in an unhealthy lifestyle are at risk of having premature babies. Even when babies come home, mothers who don't know the safest way to put their child to sleep can inadvertently contribute to an infant's death.

Rochelle Peters, who is white, lost her infant daughter, Katie, to a rare virus, even though she went regularly to prenatal visits, took her vitamins and didn't smoke, drink or use drugs. She understands state budget problems but thinks the benefit outweighs the cost.

"The money saves lives," said Peters, a Livonia resident. "It's a shame they don't think these lives are the priority."

Resch said state funds for infant mortality will continue to be available.

[Read the Special Report "Infants at High Risk," which examined Michigan's efforts to reduce infant death rates. Get Home Delivery](#)

"That \$1 million was not by any stretch of the imagination all the state spends on infant mortality," he said. "There are other programs. We just recently received a half-million-dollar grant from the federal government for a program concerning infant mortality in the African-American community."

The fund's intent is twofold. The 11 communities were charged with spending some of it on supporting their fetal infant mortality review teams. These teams investigate the death of most infants to determine what, if anything, could have been done to prevent it.

The counties were also to take a look at all the programs to prevent infant mortality and determine how they were working together to identify and refer at-risk mothers to programs.

Meanwhile, \$250,000 of the \$1 million is funneled to Tomorrow's Child/Michigan SIDS (sudden infant death syndrome) for efforts the organization has launched to establish a statewide hospital intervention program that would deliver a safe sleep message to every new mother, as well as training for child care providers.

"It's not just a project that takes money, it gives back," said Sandra Frank, executive director of Tomorrow's Child. "It keeps babies alive."

Health officials note that one year of funding is not enough to investigate and come up with effective plans to address the problem.

"You don't make an investment and time and commitment only to have it fold up," said Tom Kalkofen, director of the Macomb County Health Department.

Kalkofen's department was in the early stages of using the \$65,000 his county got this year from the fund. The possible loss of it will affect numerous programs, including the start of a fetal infant mortality review team. Macomb is the only Metro Detroit county without one.

Douglas Paterson, director of the Bureau of Family, Maternal and Child Health in the Michigan Community Health Department, said many counties may feel frustrated.

"Some counties will continue on, but to others it will be a setback," he said.

Melva Craft-Blacksheare, a certified nurse midwife and resident of Detroit, can't understand why the state may abandon even the smallest investment to continue efforts to keep infants alive.

"It's just ridiculous for them to cut this money," Craft-Blacksheare said. "You look at the health of your country by looking at the infant mortality rate."

Detroit News Staff Writer Doug Guthrie contributed to this report. You can reach Kim Kozlowski at (313) 222-2024 or kkozlowski@detnews.com.

Infant mortality rate is met with indifference State lawmakers' priorities lie elsewhere

Sunday, July 3, 2005
Ann Arbor News Editorial

Michigan came out poorly again in a recent ranking of states for infant mortality. Its eight infants per 1,000 dying before their first birthday from the years 2000-02 made it 13th worst in the nation.

But look closely at Michigan's numbers on births and prenatal care, and they show that it's not all demographic groups of Michigan women who are faring so badly. Rather, it's low-income black and Hispanic women.

Compiled by the Lansing-based Michigan League for Human Services, the figures indicate a gap in health care for women so striking between the minority and white populations that policy makers should be shamed into action to help close it:

Pregnant black women received late or no care at three times the rate of white women.

Hispanic women received late or no care at more than twice the rate of white women.

The rate of babies born at least three weeks early was almost twice that for blacks as for whites. Black women's children weighed less than normal at more than double the rate of white and Hispanic children.

Unfortunately, though, the findings of the league's report couldn't have come at a more inopportune time. Released in hopes of convincing policy makers of the need to improve programs for poor pregnant women, the study's results aired last week against the backdrop of many lawmakers in Lansing showing little commitment to health-care programs for the poor, and to education funding.

As previously noted on this page, lawmakers' proposals to cut loose people who now are eligible for Medicaid - including 30,000 who care for a low-income child - are being negotiated at the state House.

Schools, meanwhile, haven't received an increase in the per-pupil minimum of \$6,700 for three years. Little if any more will likely be coming this year - particularly bad news to poor and especially many poor Hispanic women. The league study noted that nearly one of two Hispanic mothers did not have a high school education - four times the rate among whites.

Certainly strong parental- and significant other-support can help improve the health care of pregnant women and of girls of child-bearing age.

But well-funded and carefully administered outreach and institutional health and education programs also could go a long way toward improving outcomes for the state's poor and minority women.

In Michigan, however, priorities too often lie elsewhere.

"Other states have made progress" on the infant mortality rate, said the league's Jane Zehnder-Merrell, "but we've kept the same rate."

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ANOTHER POINT OF VIEW: To survive, state must readjust its fiscal visions

July 3, 2005

BY DENNIS M. PARADIS

Lansing ... we have a problem.

Michigan's short-term vision is overshadowed by partisan politics.

The Democrats are trying to get through the 2006 election without a general tax increase. The consequence is desperation measures such as the proposed "physician tax."

The Republicans, on the other hand, will try to get Gov. Jennifer Granholm to accept changes that her supporters oppose in order to weaken her position in the coming election.

As for the state's long-term vision is, there isn't one.

Michigan's state revenues will not equal spending unless changes are made. And until this structural budget deficit is addressed, the state will not have a healthy economy. But our policy makers fail to look beyond the next fiscal year.

Any student of state government knows that Michigan needs more revenue. Our mental health, welfare and health care programs are already stretched so thin that they cannot truly be called a safety net.

First, Michigan leaders need to put partisan differences aside and work to rebuild our state. We need to identify the bedrock responsibilities of the state in areas such as education, health care, welfare, job creation, etc., and then agree that we will not cut into that foundation.

Second, Michigan must redesign its tax structure to address the needs of the 21st Century. Our historic reliance on a heavy manufacturing tax base is no longer viable. Business should contribute to the tax base but not at a rate that leaves Michigan at a competitive disadvantage. We must revisit areas such as liquor taxes that have been politically protected from tax increases. We also need to eliminate the "pork barrel" tax expenditure projects that have accumulated over the decades.

When these tasks are complete, Michigan can then review the budget again. If revenue still does not meet expenses, Michigan must raise taxes.

Now is the time for Michigan's Legislature to adjust its vision for the future of the state.

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Michigan Department of Human Services Summarily Suspends the Group Day Care Home License of Tammy Fuller

July 5, 2005

The Michigan Department of Human Services (DHS), Office of Children and Adult Licensing issued an order of summary suspension and notice of intent to revoke the license of Calhoun County group day care home provider Tammy Fuller, 192 Riverside Drive, Battle Creek, Michigan. This action resulted from a recent investigation of a complaint of the child day care group home.

The July 1, 2005 complaint investigation found violations of the Child Care Organizations Act and/or day care family home promulgated rules requiring "emergency action" under the Michigan Administrative Procedures Act, MCL 24.292(2).

Effective 6:00 p.m., July 1, 2005, the Summary Suspension Order prohibits Tammy Fuller from operating a group day care home at 192 Riverside Drive, Battle Creek, Michigan or at any other address or location. Accordingly, she may not accept children for care after that date and time. The order also requires Ms. Fuller to inform all of the parents of children in her care that her license has been suspended and that she can no longer provide day care.

Ms. Fuller has held a license to operate a group day care home since January 21, 2003. The license was for 12 children.

Michigan law defines a group day care home as a private home in which more than six but not more than 12 minor children are given care and supervision for periods of less than 24 hours a day, unattended by a parent or legal guardian, except children related to an adult member of the family by blood, marriage, or adoption. Group day care home includes a home that gives care to an unrelated minor child for more than four weeks during a calendar year.

For more information, consult DHS Web site at www.michigan.gov/dhs.